

## Nationwide Trends

A number of information sources are used to quantify America's drug problem and to monitor drug abuse trends. Foremost among these sources are the Monitoring the Future (MTF) survey<sup>†</sup> and the National Survey on Drug Use and Health<sup>††</sup> (NSDUH). Since 1975, the MTF survey has measured drug, alcohol, and cigarette use as well as related attitudes among adolescent students nationwide. For the 2009 survey, 46,097 students in 8th, 10th, and 12th grades from 389 public and private schools participated. Funded by NIDA, the MTF survey is conducted by investigators at the University of Michigan.

The NSDUH is an annual survey on the nationwide prevalence and incidence of illicit drug, alcohol, and tobacco use, abuse, and dependence among Americans aged 12 years and older, conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Approximately 67,500 people are included in this survey. Because of differences in the timing of administration of the surveys, reported NSDUH data are 1 year behind those of MTF.

In MTF and NSDUH, there are three primary prevalence periods for which data are reported: lifetime, past year, and past month

(also referred to as "current"). It is generally believed that *past year* and *past month* are the better indicators of actual use. However, some analyses are done for only one specific prevalence period; therefore, data for both past year and past month are reported here.

Additional sources of information are provided at the end of this fact sheet.

### Trends

#### Alcohol

Overall, the prevalence of underage (ages 12–20) alcohol use and binge drinking has been in a long-term, gradual decline across all three grade levels.

In 2008, an estimated 31 million people (12.4 percent) aged 12 or older reported driving under the influence of alcohol at least once in the past year. Although this reflects a downward trend from 14.2 percent in 2002, it remains a cause for concern.

#### Tobacco

According to NIDA's MTF survey, smoking rates are at their lowest point in the history of the survey. However, in the past year, smoking prevalence among all three grades remains unchanged.

The NSDUH found that from 2002 to 2008, the rate of past-month cigarette use fell from 13.0 percent to 9.1 percent among 12- to 17-year olds. Another encouraging trend is the decline in cigarette use by young adults aged 18 to 25 years—from 40.8 percent in 2002 to 35.7 percent in 2008.

## Illicit Drugs

The decline in illicit drug use by the Nation's adolescents since the mid- to late-1990s has leveled off. Among 8th-, 10th-, and 12th-graders, lifetime, past-year, and current illicit drug use remained unchanged from 2008 to 2009. However, from 2004 to 2009, lifetime use of illicit drugs among 10th- and 12th-graders fell by about 10 and 9 percent, respectively. The trend for illicit drug use has been driven largely by reported use of marijuana.

- **Marijuana** use across the three grades has shown a consistent decline since the mid-1990s, but the trend has stalled, with prevalence rates the same in 2009 as they were 5 years ago. Perceived risk of regular marijuana use decreased among 8th- and 10th-graders, while perceived availability declined among 12th-graders.
- Between 2004 and 2009, a drop in past-year use of **methamphetamine** was reported for all grades. Among 10th- and 12th-graders, 5-year declines were reported for past-year use of **amphetamine**.

- According to NSDUH, current **cocaine** use gradually declined between 2003 and 2008 among people aged 12 or older (from 2.3 million to 1.9 million). In 2009, significant declines from 2008 were also seen in past-year use of cocaine among 12th-graders and in current cocaine use among 10th- and 12th-graders in the MTF survey. Another positive long-term decline (from 2004 to 2009) was seen in lifetime, past-year, and current use of **crack cocaine** among 10th- and 12th-graders.
- Both past-year and past-month use rates of **hallucinogens** among 12th-graders fell significantly between 2008 and 2009. Also during that time, lifetime use of **heroin** and current use of **inhalants** decreased significantly among 10th-graders.

Despite some downward trends, the MTF survey data highlight some problem areas. For example, there has been an increase in lifetime, past-month, and daily use of smokeless tobacco among 10th-graders. Also, for the fourth year in a row, there was a drop in perceived harmfulness of MDMA (ecstasy) reported for all grades. Changes in attitude such as these often precede increases in use.

## Prescription Drugs

Another area of concern is the nonmedical use of prescription drugs. Among 12th-graders, 8 of the 13 most commonly abused drugs (excluding tobacco and alcohol) were

prescription or over-the-counter medications, over half of which were given to them or were purchased from a friend or relative.

According to the 2009 MTF survey, past-year nonmedical use of **Vicodin** and **OxyContin** increased during the last 5 years among 10th-graders; and remained unchanged among 8th- and 12th-graders. Nearly 1 in 10 high school seniors reported past-year nonmedical use of Vicodin, and 1 in 20 abused OxyContin. The NSDUH showed that in 2008, the number of individuals aged 12 or older who abused prescription pain relievers for the first time (2.2 million) was roughly even with that of marijuana.

Complete NSDUH findings are available at <http://oas.samhsa.gov/NSDUHLatest.htm>.

Complete MTF survey findings are available at <http://www.monitoringthefuture.org>.

## Other Information Sources

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey is a school-based survey that collects data from students in grades 9–12. The survey includes questions on a wide variety of health-related risk behaviors, including drug abuse. The survey is part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System. More information is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/yrbs/index.htm>.

Additional information about high school and youth trends is available on the NIDA Web site at <http://www.nida.nih.gov/Infofacts/HSYouthtrends.html>.

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### Data Sources

† These data are from the 2009 Monitoring the Future survey, funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health, Department of Health and Human Services, and conducted annually by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. The survey has tracked 12th-graders' illicit drug use and related attitudes since 1975; in 1991, 8th- and 10th-graders were added to the study. The latest data are on line at [www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov).

†† NSDUH (formerly known as the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse) is an annual survey of Americans aged 12 and older conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Department of Health and Human Services. This survey is available on line at [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov) and can be ordered by phone from NIDA at 877-643-2644.

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